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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses trends and issues in the progressive inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools and classes. It examines the current changing school scene in terms of changes directly affecting students with disabilities and those who work with them (such as deinstitutionalization of students with severe and profound disabilities), demographic changes that cause increasing numbers of students to have special needs, and changes in the economics of the school situation. The authors urge a progressive inclusion policy that requires "deliberate speed" in efforts to make regular schools strong valid resources for all children, including those with special needs. Design characteristics of an effective inclusive school are suggested based on a meta-review of the research literature, which quantified the relative influences on learning of 28 factors ranging from classroom management, through classroom climate and curriculum design, to district demographics. Additional suggestions for moving toward greater inclusion are also offered, such as merging Title I, learning disability, and related programs for students showing learning-rate problems in basic academic areas, integrating professional groups, and setting a common sunset date for legislation affecting all categorical programs in education. (Contains 20 references.) (DB)

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PROGRESSIVE INCLUSION: MEETING NEW CHALLENGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

By

Margaret C. Wang and Maynard C. Reynolds

How to effectively and efficiently serve disabled children in regular school programs has been a central theme of special education reform ever since the landmark Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142). In the 1990s, this theme has become a growing, even urgent, concern. Various descriptive terms have been in vogue in this policy arena over the past two decades, including mainstreaming, inclusion, integration, the regular education initiative (REI), and the least restrictive environment (LRE) principle. We prefer the term "progressive inclusion" (Reynolds, 1991). Beyond the nuances of difference in meaning, each term refers to the dual focus of (a) bringing children who are disabled out of their "special" classes and schools and into regular school environments, and (b) reducing special education referrals and labels by strengthening regular school programs (Wang, 1994).

No matter what term is currently in use, the policy for inclusive education is declared, and is large and moving (Wang & Reynolds, 1995). Some believe the progress is too slow and the inclusiveness too limited, whereas others see it as too rapid and based on arguable assumptions. But there is an increasing recognition that in order to meet current challenges and to assure that high quality education is achieved for all students, there must be strong teamwork among educators in regular education programs and specialists of all kinds, using the best current know-how (Brandt, 1994/1995). With the current momentum in educational reforms for equity in educational outcomes for all students, including and especially for those with special needs, it appears that changes in the special education-regular education relationships will accelerate in the near future.

We consider it a great moral victory for our society that wave after wave of legislative action has affirmed the right of all children—even those who are most difficult to teach—to an education that is inclusive and beneficial for each individual child. The universal right to education is now more than a rhetorical tradition; it is becoming a legal reality. But the struggle to meet all standards continues (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1994). More is involved, of course, than just changing special education referral and placement practices. Delivering special education as an integral component of one education system for all children requires a major

restructuring of schools and of teacher education, revisions in funding and accountability systems, and changes in assessment and instructional grouping practices.

The prominence of inclusion in current efforts for educational reform represents no simple swing of the pendulum. The history of special education shows a steady trend of progressive inclusion, beginning with total neglect, then moving to distal arrangements for a few students (as in remote residential schools), to local special day schools, to special classes in regular schools, to resource rooms where students spend part of their school time (the remainder is spent in regular classes), and finally to full inclusion in regular schools and classes. In many places this full continuum still exists, and some argue for its continuation over the full range. Others refer derisively to "continuum tolerators" (Brown, 1991) and argue for fast moves to regular education placements. In our view the steady trend of progressive inclusion will and should continue, probably with some near-term acceleration.

The Changing School Scene

Several particular kinds of change are now evident on the special education scene. Three important areas of such change are discussed below: (a) changes directly affecting disabled students and all the people who work with them, (b) demographic changes that cause increasing numbers of students to have special needs, and (c) changes in the economics of the school situation.

Changes directly affecting students

Deep structural changes that directly affect disabled students include the following:

- Severely and profoundly disabled children have been deinstitutionalized and are now presented to local schools for enrollment. Rates of placement in residential institutions have reached near-zero rates for children classified as mentally retarded or developmentally disabled (Lakin, Hill, Hauber, & Bruininks, 1982). Much of this shift in placements can be associated with the so-called "medicaid waiver," which permits states to shift disabled persons and dollars (mainly federal funds) to community agencies.
- Special day schools maintained by separate intermediate school districts and by some large school districts are being closed. The disabled students they served, many of them moderately to severely disabled, are being enrolled in regular schools. Often this involves small "clusters" of disabled students who are placed in special classes in regular schools, but with some shared experiences in regular classes.

- Increasing numbers of school boards and other policy-making bodies have mandated that "pullout" services, such as resource room placements, be reduced or eliminated. Often, resource teachers are continued in employment, but in "team" arrangements with regular class teachers. This change involves large numbers of students and staff.

These changes remind us that the field of special education has never been affirmed in an existing structure. Change has been a constant, involving difficult role changes and giving up what is comfortable. For some people, it implies a negative assessment of what they have been doing. Each major change engenders, among some, feelings of loss and resistance, while other "early adopters" find challenge and reward in the process. Change brings about new relationships among staff, uncertainties about supports, doubts about whether what is new is better, and various forms of stress and struggle.

Nonetheless, there is strong momentum for positioning special education reform in the 1990s as an integral part of the general and systemic education reforms, as reflected in reports of various special commissions (e.g., National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992) and recently passed legislation such as Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the Improving America's Schools Act. We hope for carefully planned change, but concerns about cost could fuel pell-mell changes that ignore important principles and negate recent practical gains.

Demographic changes

Demographic and socioeconomic changes have resulted in an increasingly diverse and disadvantaged student population, posing increased challenges to educators. A growing proportion of the child population is placed in highly adverse circumstances such as poverty, drug-infested communities, and, in general, unsafe environments with limited health care and fragmented patterns of services. Many children feel unwanted and lead fearful lives, and abuse and neglect are common (Children's Defense Fund, 1992; Levy & Copple, 1989).

Side effects of these conditions manifest in the schools in various forms, such as limited hope and motivation to learn; frequent incidents of violence, illness, and emotional disturbance; and increased absenteeism. Such problems place children and youth at risk of educational failure and, by necessity, place schools at the center of interconnected social problems and an increasingly pressing demand for all kinds of "special" services, including special education.

Clearly, schools are not equipped to deal with the full range and impact of the problems presented by the students of the 1990s. The problems of neglected and alienated children and youth will not be solved by increasing numbers of categorical programs, greater use of labels, and more separation of programs. To imagine that they will be solved through better teacher education

or inservice staff development projects is unrealistic. The general structure and operation of the schools must be reexamined and revised, and collaboration with parents and various agencies of the community must expand (Sailor et al., 1989; Wang & Reynolds, 1995).

A broad range of collaborative and coordinated services that link schools and other agencies are needed both in and beyond schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1989; National Commission on Children, 1991; Rigsby, Reynolds, & Wang, 1995). Finding ways to coordinate the required resources in each community is a central concern in the current wave of systemic educational reform. Achieving such coordination will be a difficult, slow, and uneven process—a process that will be resisted by some.

The financial crunch

The growth of special education programs occurred rapidly in a period of relatively high economic gains in the nation, the 1950s through the early 1970s. During the 1970s, the total school-age population was declining, making it relatively easy in the 1980s for schools to accommodate new and expensive programs. Some of the surplus regular classroom teachers who received "pink slips" were able to move to special education assignments, which helped alleviate potential problems.

Beginning early in the 1980s, the general school population began to increase, and that trend will continue for at least the next decade. In this same period, family-level income has declined for most people and resistance to increases in public expenditure has mounted. Deficits in public funds grew alarmingly in the 1980s. The result is a relatively new and vigorous competition for funds between the two quite separate systems of regular and special education, and a resistance to new taxes. Here is where crude systems of "caps" could easily intrude on the special education scene. These deep monetary issues are a large reason that accelerated changes seem virtually inevitable. New and powerful actions are entering the special education arena, as evidenced, for example, in Arab's (1994) *New York Times* article or the recent four-part series in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (1994).

A Policy Preference

We favor a progressive inclusion policy, one that requires "deliberate speed" in efforts to make regular schools into strong, valid resources for all children, including those with special needs. Albert Shanker (1994), president of the American Federation of Teachers, has vigorously opposed the extreme elements of such an inclusionary policy, fearing disturbances in school programs serving other students. This concern should not be disregarded. Although we do not favor rigidities that would place literally all children in general education classrooms for their

entire school experience, neither do we favor contentment with categorical programs, labels, pullouts, and set-asides. The database clearly indicates that too often these disparate though well-intentioned categories of special programs tend to provide a disservice rather than a service to those who are most vulnerable.

We are at an historical juncture where we should be closing institutions and special schools for students with disabilities and enrolling them in Comprehensive Local Schools (CLS) (Sailor et al., 1989). This shift will involve some clustering of small numbers of students with extreme disabilities for placement in particular schools. But to the maximum extent feasible, disabled students should attend the school they would attend were they not disabled. Dollar savings through reduction in special transportation programs should be substantial. We do not suggest, however, that all students should be placed instantly in regular classes. Such a step would be very difficult, especially in cases of extremely severe disabilities. The essential concern is how to establish school learning environments that offer the most efficient and effective instructional arrangements for all students—with the end goal of inclusive placements.

In making this policy proposal, we are mindful of the need for all students and all members of the community to learn to relate to human diversity in inclusive settings with decency, respect, and commitment. It is unreasonable to expect children to grow up with the ability to establish and cherish high standards regarding human relationships if they grow up in segregated environments that limit their experience with human diversity. Inclusiveness in schooling, as we see it, is ultimately important for the creation and maintenance of a free and just society. It is with this notion of deeply shared responsibility and total school/community involvement in serving persons with disabilities that Will (1986) advanced the concept of the regular education initiative. Our own views reflect the same conviction (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1994).

Design for an Inclusive School that Works

What should be the design characteristics of an inclusive school that effectively serves all children? It is important to have a vision, widely shared among stakeholders, of the goal or situation to be achieved. The general public policy has been made clear—that is, schools should be as inclusive of disabled students as possible, assuming all necessary supports are available, in regular classes and schools. However, it will take time and much hard work to create situations that are inclusive and beneficial to all students.

A key consideration in working out the desired vision of schooling for all students, including those with disabilities, should be, "What causes desired Teaming to take place?" When resource teachers are moving from their own separate classrooms to teaming arrangements in

regular classes, they should be clear that their goal is to optimize student Teaming, and they should contribute their expertise in specific ways. If a clear structure for their role in teaming arrangements is lacking, their new work situation could become chaotic. Or they could find themselves in a situation where their skills are not being utilized (e.g., performing the task of a teacher's aide or a self-perception of being viewed as another aide in the classroom). Such developments have a negative effect on morale and lead away from what is truly important—the Teaming of the students.

There is a substantial research base on what works in serving students with special needs. This knowledge base can (and should) be used by teachers, parents, and others as the basis for school reforms that aim to improve the educational outcomes of all children. Reviews and metareviews of research on instruction and learning reveal a consistent knowledge base on what works in improving student Teaming. In a recent study, a metareview of the research literature was combined with the judgment of researchers and practicing educators to identify the variables or practices that are well confirmed as a valid basis for instruction (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Major findings from this study are summarized in Figure 1, showing 28 categories of variables in order of their influence on Teaming.

The figures in the right-hand column of Figure 1 represent the average influence score for each category calculated by weighing composites of effects and ratings obtained from experts, and content analysis of authoritative literature (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Data presented in Figure 1 reveal that direct psychological influences include: classroom management, climate, and student/teacher interactions; students' cognitive and metacognitive abilities and motivation; amount and quality of instruction; and parental encouragement and support of Teaming at home. Variables that are one step removed from the Teaming situation have a relatively moderate influence, including: school culture; teacher/administrator decision making; community influences; and the peer group outside school. The variables that are far removed from the learning setting, which include school and district demographics, state-level policies, and school policies, have the least influence, even though many policymakers are currently preoccupied with educational restructuring at remote organizational levels.

These findings, worked through to the level of classroom application particulars, comprise a database on principles of effective instruction. These are the matters for attention in refining a vision of what an inclusive school should be. They provide a basis for the detailed incremental work to be done in creating effective schools. In addition, all that is known about organizational development, staff development, and change processes needs to be applied as we seek the creation

Figure 1. Relative Influences on Learning

Classroom Management	64.8
Metacognitive Processes	63.0
Cognitive Processes	61.3
Home Environment/Parental Support	58.4
Student/Teacher Social Interaction	56.7
Social/Behavioral Attributes	55.2
Motivational/Affective Attributes	54.8
Peer Group	53.9
Quantity of Instruction	53.7
School Culture	53.3
Classroom Climate	52.3
Classroom instruction	52.1
Curriculum Design	51.3
Student/Teacher Academic Interactions	50.9
Classroom Assessment	50.4
Community Influences	49.0
Psychomotor Skills	48.9
Teacher/Administrator Decision Making	48.4
Curriculum and Instruction	47.7
Parental Involvement Policy	45.8
Classroom Implementation/Support	45.7
Student Demographics	44.8
Out-of-Class Time	44.3
Program Demographics	42.8
School Demographics	41.4
State-Level Policies	37.0
School Policies	36.5
District Demographics	32.9

Note: Adapted with permission from Wang, Haertel, & Walberg (1993, 1994)

of inclusive schools. Schools of today fall far short of implementing the knowledge base for effective teaching and learning. Working together, special and regular educators can lead the way in reshaping the schools into vital institutions.

Inclusion in a Broader Context

It is clear that inclusion should apply to more than students and their teachers. The movement toward inclusion must be understood in the context of a broad social policy framework. Deinstitutionalization, for example, occurred in a period when local special education programs were expanding. But there are anomalies as well, such as the many local programs that are becoming noncategorical while universities continue to offer only narrow forms of categorical teacher preparation and federal authorities require reports from the schools by category.

In a recent conference involving representatives of many categorical programs and stakeholders of all varieties (parents, students, advocacy groups) a number of the broad implications for inclusion were identified (Wang & Reynolds, 1995). The following were among the suggestions for moving toward inclusion:

- Merging Title I, learning disability, and related programs for students showing learning-rate problems in basic academic areas (e.g., reading and arithmetic).
- Integrating professional groups, such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and The Association for the Severely Handicapped (TASH), and further integration with the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).
- Setting a common sunset date for legislation affecting all categorical programs in education, and seeking broadly integrated revisions of programs and policies across all such programs.
- Working for formation of small or mini-schools in which small clusters of students and teachers remain together for several years, with special programs as integral parts of such schools, and without labels for students.
- Combining of research funds and operations so that total, integrated school programs are explicitly an object of universal attention.
- Combining and coordinating programs within institutions of higher education to reflect the movement toward inclusiveness and noncategorical programs in the schools.
- Working to strengthen and meld the work of the currently categorical advocacy groups, so that they more fully support inclusive schools and delabeling policies.

- Revising bureaucratic structures of governmental offices so that they fully reflect a commitment to inclusive schools and noncategorical approaches in most of special education.

It may be especially difficult to attain full inclusiveness at the levels of higher education, government, and advocacy groups. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that integration will occur in programs for children if the supporting, monitoring, and funding systems remain disparate.

Conclusion: A Glimpse to the Future

The field of special education has been on a long journey, involving many difficult changes. Recent advances have brought literally all children and youth into the schools and, increasingly, into inclusive arrangements within the schools. The important place of parents in planning education for their children has been established. We believe these advances—the "zero-reject" principle and parent participation in planning—will be maintained, but in most other aspects the field will doubtless continue to change. There are important reasons for strong moves toward inclusion at this time.

Already some of the new challenges can be seen, including the need to: establish the place of exceptional students in mini-schools (Raywid, 1989); reduce practices of labeling students; bring more attention to preventive practices; clarify and establish the responsibility for leadership on behalf of exceptional students by general administrators; redefine who the clients are for special education; redirect more of the categorical funds to revised general school structures; create more trust in relationships among school staff and parents; and link school programs with those of other human services agencies with effectiveness and efficiency.

In special education, as in other aspects of education, future changes will go beyond anything we can now imagine. Social planning tends to be myopic. If we cannot always be clear about the distant future, we are wise to seek broad participation in what can be seen clearly as near-term changes. As Nobel laureate Herbert Simon (1981) has said: "Each of us sits in a long dark hall within a circle of light cast by a small lamp. The lamplight penetrates a few feet up and down the hall, then rapidly attenuates, diluted by the vast darkness of future and past that surrounds it" (p. 178). In education, the near future is urgent and important change now, with continuing long-term change farther down time's hallway.

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The Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success

The Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of ten regional educational laboratories in the country funded by the U.S. Department of Education to revitalize and reform educational practices in the service of educational success of all children and youth in this country.

The mission of the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is to play a pivotal role in the educational reform process throughout the mid-Atlantic region to significantly affect the region's capacity for bringing about lasting improvements in the learning of its increasingly diverse student population.

The LSS will facilitate the transformation of research-based knowledge into useful tools that can be readily integrated into the educational reform process both regionally and nationally. Likewise, the work of the LSS will be continously refined based on feedback from the field on what is working and what is needed.

The ultimate goal of the LSS is a connected system of schools, parents, community agencies, professional groups, and institutions of higher education that not only comes "up to scale" for the entire region but also is linked with a high-tech national system for information exchange. In particular, the aim is to bring researchers and research-based knowledge into synergistic and coherent coordination with efforts for educational improvement led by field-based professionals.

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